

A COMPLETE NOVEL EACH WEEK IN THE EVENING WORLD

CHERUB DEVINE

The Adventures of a Wall Street Man
In a Country Estate of Mysteries

By Sewell Ford

Author of "SHORTY MCCABE," ETC.



SEWELL FORD

CHAPTER IX.

"STOP, father, stop. This is too absurd." The Countess Vecchi had stepped between the two men. "It was all my fault. I was running away and Mr. Devine tried to stop me and when I wouldn't be stopped he went with me and carried my bag. Then it rained and he got wet. And he brought me back from the village when I was tired. He has behaved splendidly. Don't you dare call him any more names! He is splendid, splendid, and he is very wet."

"Wet, all right," commented the "Cherub," looking down ruefully at the little pool of water which had leaked from his clothes on the polished floor of the hall.

"Sure, he's wet," assented Mrs. Timmins solemnly.

Mr. Hewington's stern gaze changed into a puzzled stare.

"I don't understand, Adele, just what explanation there is in Mr. Devine's being wet. I want to know why he induced you to run away with him."

"But he didn't induce me to run away at all, father. He tried to stop me from making me wear his coat, and so got wet. He may take cold and die. See, he is dripping even now."

In a dazed manner Mr. Hewington repeated once more the obviously damp condition of Mr. Devine's garments.

"Yes, yes, Adele, I suppose it is all right, but it is not yet clear in my mind."

The "Cherub" was not inclined to continue the dialogue. "Oh, we'll straighten that all out in the morning," Mr. Hewington. Just now I would advise you to see that the Countess is taken care of. She is tired and almost as wet as I am."

A moment later the chiming of a French clock announced the hour of three.

"Three o'clock!" exclaimed the "Cherub." "I don't believe you'll catch that seven-thirty train, will you?"

She started up the stairs, but he turned to smile and shake her head. It was a friendly smile.

CHAPTER X.

Why do you want me to stay? The Countess was asking Mr. Devine these questions with as much sincerity as if there could be no possible reason why he should object to her leaving Hewington Acres.

"Why—why, because you ought to, because I want you to stay. Don't you see? I want you to stay."

For the better part of the day the "Cherub" had been waiting for just this opportunity. Now that it had come, he stood staring at her with a blank, baffled look in his blue eyes.

The Countess glanced curiously at him and then turned away with a light laugh.

"Do you think those are very good reasons, Mr. Devine?"

He had found her in her favorite retreat, a rustic summer house perched on a little point of rocks which jutted out into the Sound and marked the eastern boundary of the estate. She had been examining some papers from a Japanese document box, but she hastily put them away when she saw him approaching.

The Countess showed no ill effects from her midnight walk in the rain, nor did she evince any inclination toward the adventure. It was when the "Cherub" had said that he hoped she had given up her idea of running away that she asked him why she should stay.

"Seeing that his case needed strengthening," Mr. Devine prepared for the worst.

"Look here," he said, argumentatively, "you don't think that I came up here to drive you out of your home, do you? I'll admit that I did, but I'm going to leave. The place is big enough to hold all of us, isn't it? Why not stay here for a while, anyway?"

"It's very kind of you, Mr. Devine, I'm sure, but I don't feel that I can accept such a favor from—well, from a stranger, you know."

"You'll get acquainted, then."

"But the Countess firmly held to the point. Hewington Acres was no longer her home, therefore she must leave it at once."

"Perhaps it is mine, but I don't want to leave it," she said. "I'll just leave it to a joke. I'll tell you what I'm going to do. I'm going to sell it back to your father. I'll let it go cheap because of getting rid of it."

The Countess shook her head at this proposal. "Father could not buy it back," she said.

"No, he can't go away somewhere and get another home, a home of our own. There came into the voice of the Countess a little quiver, which made Mr. Devine feel that he had won a harsh and cruel thing.

"I believe it's just because I am here that you're in such a hurry to go. If I should leave out now and never come back until—"

plied the Countess. "I have seen stock speculators before. They are just as much slaves of the market as the wretched men who haunt the gambling halls of Monte Carlo are slaves of the roulette wheel. No, you will be back in Wall Street to-morrow morning, eager for the game. It is all you live for—speculation, speculation. And, after all, it's only gambling in a big, serious way. You will go back in the morning, and by noon you will have forgotten that any such person as my poor self ever existed."

"The 'Cherub' was dumb before this outburst. It had been so unexpected. "Of course, I have no right to say such things to you," she continued, more soberly. "I did not intend to say them either. You have been very kind to me, and I—I admire you in many ways. But you should not have tried to make me believe too much. I am not a silly schoolgirl, you know. I—I have had one experience with a man who was—she hesitated at the confession—"who was a gambler."

She had turned to hide the sudden flush that crept into her cheeks. Suppressed emotion was gently shaking her shoulders.

As in a flash "Cherub" Devine knew exactly what he wanted to do now, and it was only by clapping his hands resolutely behind his back that he kept from taking her in his arms and otherwise making a spectacle of himself. He saw it all. Even if she did despise him he was in love with the Countess Vecchi.

If she should know! He was fairly appalled at his own audacity. "There, you'll forgive me, will you not?" she said, turning so quickly toward him that he started guiltily. "I didn't mean to lecture you, really I didn't. And now I must say good-bye."

"You must—say—good-bye!" He repeated the words loudly.

"Why, yes, I have decided to go to town to-night. I shall not ask you to let Timmins drive me to the station this time. You will not go until morning, I suppose."

"Do you suppose we're going to let you run off to New York alone?"

"Yes, your father and I. We have had a little talk about it."

"You and my father!" The Countess repeated the words slowly.

"Yes, we were talking over a business matter, something about the terms on which he was to keep this place, and the like, and talking about you."

"May I take time to think it over?" she asked.

"Of course, all the time you want," he replied.

The Countess paused as if about to announce that she had already changed her mind. Then she looked up quickly and replied:

"The Monday, isn't it? Well, by Wednesday night I shall probably be able to tell you exactly what I mean to do; that is, providing I am still here."

"But you can wait two days, can't you?"

"Yes, I can if you can."

When the "Cherub" understood, she meant to take him at his word and hold him to it. Although he thought of many things which might happen to him, he did not flinch.

"I'm game," he said. "We will watch each other. I'll stay to see that you don't wander off among strangers with a hundred pound suit case, and you look out that I don't rush off to Wall Street to indulge my supposed mania for gambling."

Thus the part was made between them, and they went back to the house for dinner.

CHAPTER XI.

HE clanking of a big gong announces the daily openings of the New York Stock Exchange. During five years there had never been a morning when "Cherub" Devine was not to be found within earshot of that gong when it rang in Wall Street's brief but tumultuous day. He was to be found waiting with calm confidence whatever crisis, big or little, might arise, and generally there was something of the sort.

Yet here he was at opening hour on this post-holiday Tuesday morning, only vaguely conscious that he was miles away from it all. If he remembered, it was only the troublesome thought of a moment. What did he care if a thousand gongs were ringing to open a thousand stock exchanges? They might stay open forever or close for good and all; he was helping the Countess Vecchi to bits of sweet crackers to a pair of white swans.

Thus it happened that the advent of a red-headed boy on a bicycle across the lawn, half a mile away, ringing to open a thousand stock exchanges? They might stay open forever or close for good and all; he was helping the Countess Vecchi to bits of sweet crackers to a pair of white swans.

"But I had rather not—"

Whether her protest might have been it was cut short by the prompt entrance of young Mr. Walloway. Across the room their eyes met, and in an instant there faded from his face the serene smile which he wore when with which it had been lighted. He stopped abruptly, and it seemed as if his gray eyes stared hungrily at the picture she made, standing there in the morning sunshine. The color went from his cheeks, his lips were tensely drawn.

Next he swept a questioning glance at the "Cherub," who, leaning lazily back in his chair, regarded him with mild satisfaction. The Countess, after one startled look, regained her usual calm poise. She even betrayed some amusement at the awkward pause. It was the "Cherub" who broke it.

"Well, Nick, you see I'm still rusty. (First I don't like this, then I don't like that.)"

With an obvious effort young Mr. Walloway shook off his embarrassment. Acknowledging the Countess Vecchi with a stiffly formal bow, he turned to the "Cherub," and in another moment he was deep in the business which had brought him there.

"Prepared reply message!" was his second announcement.

"You're not feeling again, are you?" queried Mr. Devine, quizzically. "Say, you can write, can't you?"

"Yes."

"Want to earn another dollar?"

"Here it is, then. Chuck this message where you put the other one and tell whoever sent it that I'm very busy, or sick and, or gone fishing—anything you think best—and sign it yourself."

This time the red-headed boy's grin was still more expansive as he pedaled jocosely away.

telegrams always meant something important. Not this kind; I'll read them Thursday morning. Isn't there some place we can go where that boy can't find us again?"

"There's the garden. And you haven't seen the dahlias yet, have you?"

"As a matter of fact, Mr. Devine did not know whether he had seen the dahlias or not. He wondered if they were on four legs, or had feathers. He declared that he hadn't seen them and wanted to, so they were soon threading the intricate winding paths where tall cannaes flaunted their green and scarlet and the asters blazed like colored stars. An hour later, when they returned to the house, they found the red-haired boy perched on the horse block.

"Three more!" he announced, producing his book. "And they all want rushing answers."

"Good!" said Mr. Devine. "Give me your book a minute."

"There!" That ought to be almost as good as cutting the wires, hadn't it? "Guess that'll do the trick," observed the boy.

He of the red hair was correct, too. No more messages were sent up from the village, and Mr. Devine's afternoon was undisturbed, being devoted to making the impressive discovery that the Countess Vecchi's brown eyes were most interesting to watch.

Wednesday morning arrived in some miraculously abrupt fashion. It found them sitting in a sunny corner of the library. The "Cherub" was smoking one of his fat, black cigars, by special request of the Countess, and he was regarding with approving eyes her slim white fingers as they employed an ivory needle in the fashioning of some utterly useless affair that looked like a lot of holes edged with spider webs.

"Beating blues," he announced to announce the presence of Mr. Nicholas Walloway, adding that his errand was urgent and important.

"Perhaps I had better take my work into another room," suggested the Countess, starting to rise.

"No, no, don't disturb the cobwebs. Nick's business isn't half so important as he thinks it is. Bring him right in, Eppings."

"But I had rather not—"

Whether her protest might have been it was cut short by the prompt entrance of young Mr. Walloway. Across the room their eyes met, and in an instant there faded from his face the serene smile which he wore when with which it had been lighted. He stopped abruptly, and it seemed as if his gray eyes stared hungrily at the picture she made, standing there in the morning sunshine. The color went from his cheeks, his lips were tensely drawn.

Next he swept a questioning glance at the "Cherub," who, leaning lazily back in his chair, regarded him with mild satisfaction. The Countess, after one startled look, regained her usual calm poise. She even betrayed some amusement at the awkward pause. It was the "Cherub" who broke it.

"Well, Nick, you see I'm still rusty. (First I don't like this, then I don't like that.)"

With an obvious effort young Mr. Walloway shook off his embarrassment. Acknowledging the Countess Vecchi with a stiffly formal bow, he turned to the "Cherub," and in another moment he was deep in the business which had brought him there.

"Prepared reply message!" was his second announcement.

"You're not feeling again, are you?" queried Mr. Devine, quizzically. "Say, you can write, can't you?"

"Yes."

"Want to earn another dollar?"

"Here it is, then. Chuck this message where you put the other one and tell whoever sent it that I'm very busy, or sick and, or gone fishing—anything you think best—and sign it yourself."

Mr. Devine had followed his friend to the door. Now returned, to find that the Countess had been looking expectantly after him.

"This is folly, Mr. Devine, nothing but folly," she said, with an attempt at sternness.

"Perhaps," assented the "Cherub," "but it's in a good cause."

"You mean that you are making this sacrifice to keep me from leaving the house that was once my home? Then I must tell you that I shall not accept it. You must go at once."

"No," said the "Cherub," doggedly. "I can't."

"Can't! Why can you not go?" She was standing directly before him, holding out her hands in a pleading manner.

"Because—well, because I think more of showing you that I'm not a born gambler than I do for all the railroad stock in the country. That's why."

This came straight from the heart of "Cherub" Devine. There could be no mistaking either the tone or the look in his blue eyes. And the Countess could see and hear. She understood.

"Oh, oh!" There was surprise in the cry, perhaps joy. For an instant she saw his face and—she smiled. She took them away the spots of color were gleaming beneath her brown eyes. Shyly and very demurely she came to him with clasped hands and kissed him on the cheek to search for the truth in his face.

"I believe you," she whispered. "Oh, I do believe in you! But I want you to go. Go this time, to please me."

"Honest? Are you sure you want me to go?" He gripped his hands tightly at his side as he looked at her. "Yes, yes, I want you to go."

The fighting spirit of all the old Continental Hewingtons must have blazed up and burned anew in her brown eyes. "Don't let them beat you. Smash them hard!" She made a gesture with her soft, white hands to illustrate what she wished him to do. The "Cherub" smiled.

"But you will not run away while I am standing here, will you?"

"Perhaps not—if you smash them hard enough."

"Good for you, Countess! You're a trump. I'll go. I'll smash 'em on my way out. But you're to stay here until—"

"Yes, yes, but you must hurry," urged the Countess. "Hurry! He is starting."

The "Cherub's" attempt to take her hands in his, she dodged behind him, whirled him about by the shoulders and pushed him toward the door.

"Hold on, Nick! I'm coming!" shouted the "Cherub."

He had just climbed into the already panting machine when the Countess ran down the steps and tossed a package to him.

"I almost forgot," she said, breathlessly. "I want you to take a package to the 'Cherub'—some stocks or bonds or something, and I want them sold. That's all. Don't stop! Hurry!" and she waved at them to be gone.

CHAPTER XII.

T remained for a train boy to disclose just how the public viewed the crisis in Mr. Devine's affairs. Half-way to the city the boy came aboard with the early afternoon edition. From the headlines it was evident that the disturbance in Wall Street had become a popular topic, the sensation of the hour.

One enterprising journal indulged in a half-page cartoon, which was supposed to represent the situation. It was entitled "Plucking a Cherub."

"It would be funnier if it wasn't so dark near the truth," growled Walloway.

"Of course I don't know just how deep you've plucked on this P. Z. & N. deal," ventured Walloway, "but I gathered that you'd gone in rather steep."

"Yes," admitted the "Cherub." "I have. In fact, it's the biggest thing I ever tackled."

Nick Walloway gazed at him incredulously. "And right in the middle of it you take a day off to feed the swans at the pond?"

"I take a year off if it was necessary."

Young Mr. Walloway paled a little and shot a quick glance over his shoulder at the man beside him. He understood. There was no mistaking the new light that beamed from the "Cherub's" blue eyes. The Walloway jaw clenched. For several moments nothing more was said. Then, in a voice strained and hard, a voice driven outward by an unbending will, he said:

"That's the fifty we must get to-morrow morning," responded the "Cherub."

"It can't be done," declared Walloway, dropping his head into a chair. "The country has been raked with a fine-toothed comb. I'm sorry, Cherub, but I've done my best for you."

"You're as bad as the Countess," chuckled the "Cherub," amiably. "This is a reflection recalled something to his mind. He thrust out his hand into an inner pocket of his coat and drew out a long envelope, at which he stared blankly.

"Twinkle of guilt pricked his conscience. There he had completely forgotten the first errand with which he had entrusted him. Doubtless it was to exchange this stock for cash that he had had an anxious to come to the city. Perhaps he had been expecting a remittance by every mail. And he had carried them about in his pocket all this time without giving them a thought! Well, he had been tempted to the sale of them the first thing on the morrow, no matter what else might transpire. Shamefacedly he opened the envelope to make an idle examination of the contents. At the first glimpse his expression changed. Hastily he ran through the documents, then shoved them back into the envelope and said:

"How many shares did you say we lacked, Nick?"

"Fifty," gloomily responded Mr. Walloway, his head between his hands.

"And about how much would they be worth to me just now?"

"Why, anything—three hundred, five hundred, a thousand dollars a share, if you could get them—which you can't."

"Well, what do you say to that?" and he tossed the long envelope to the "Cherub."

That young man took his head from between his hands and glanced reproachfully at the "Cherub." It was no time for joking. But he took the packet and began a spiritless investigation. Suddenly he jumped to his feet.

"Devine!" he exclaimed hoarsely. "These are P. Z. & N. preferred!"

"Sure." The "Cherub" was watching him with calm interest.

"And there are twenty-five—fifty—one hundred shares!"

"Right again, Nick."

"But where on earth—Cherub, are you a wizard?"

"Don't get excited, Nick, or go to calling me names because I've had a little luck. Just make a note of it that the Countess Vecchi has sold thousands of shares of P. Z. & N. stock at a profit of a hundred percent."

"Afford to! Why, Devine, this gives me the four-hundred-dollar road, you've got the Bates-Rimmer crowd under your thumb. You've won, man; you've won!"

"Yes, I've won—a railroad. That's all I know how to win so far."

"Come on, let's go have a game of billiards. I'll string you twenty but-tons."

In the first one Mr. Devine asked if the Hewingtons were still there. In the second he was demanded to be informed if the Countess Vecchi had gone. In the third he cautioned Timmins to wire him if the Countess made any preparation for leaving. In the fourth he asked anxiously as to the condition of the Countess Vecchi's sick aunt, whom he had never seen.

Later telegrams instructed Timmins to meet various afternoon trains, and then told him to be at the station at 5.30, as Mr. Devine was coming up on a special.

Eppings, also, was favored with two messages which he passed him that day. Devine would be there for dinner, and finally the Countess herself received this communication:

"Wait. Coming up to-night. Important."

As a result Hewington Acres hummed with anticipation. What could it mean? What had happened? Devine was going to happen?

Possibly the only person in the entire household who was neither surprised with excitement nor on tiptoe from anticipation was the Countess Vecchi. She was sitting in her room, looking out at the blue eyes of "Cherub" Devine had survived with a key which had solved every riddle of his brain's contents.

Walloway was Devine's companion on the trip from town on the special.

Cherub's eyes fell on the object at which young Mr. Walloway was so earnestly gazing. It was nothing more than the gold oval which he wore as a watch fob. It was open. Glancing carelessly over Nick's shoulder, the "Cherub" saw that it contained a picture, a miniature on ivory, of the picture on which young Mr. Walloway was gazing with such rapt interest. It was a likeness of the Countess Vecchi.

And in that instant it was made clear to him that the woman whom rumor had told him Nicholas had loved, and lost, and still continued to love, was the Countess Vecchi.

"Well, Nick," he began, "we're almost there. Now, the first thing on the docket is for you to fix up this place about the house with the Countess."

"I?" exclaimed Nicholas.

"Why, sure. You know her better than I do. You go up and have a talk with her. Tell her how you sold the stocks and what she can buy back the property for."

"But—but—why don't you?"

"Well, I've got to skip back to town on the special. I'll be in and get you started straight. You can do it so much better than I can, being one of her own kind, and all. Aren't you afraid of the Countess, are you?"

"Why, no; but see here, Cherub?"

"Now, that's all right, Nick. You can do the first thing, say, you call me up on the phone at ten o'clock to-night and let me know how you come out, eh? Don't forget that, about 9 o'clock. Just give me a line about the time."

You'll have some report or other to make, I'll bet. Needn't make too much of my share in the business; just talk like I'd handed it over to you, as I have. You're equal to that job, aren't you?"

For many months Walloway had wanted to see the Countess Vecchi. She had wished for a chance to talk to her alone, and now this very opportunity was thrust upon him.

"Well, Cherub, if you think you had better leave this to me, why, I—"

"Good! Up to-night, let me know what luck you have."

lah, the whole household was assembled to witness the "Cherub's" much heralded return.

In his stead there stepped from the carriage Mr. Nicholas Walloway. Mr. Hewington voiced the common thought in one question:

"Why, Nicholas, where is Mr. Devine?"

"Mr. Devine is on his way back to town."

"But he sent word"—began the Countess, only to be stopped by Mr. Walloway's hasty explanation.

"He has asked me to transfer some business with you, Countess. Might I have a moment?"

The Countess Vecchi promptly led him into the library. When they were alone she demanded of him impatiently:

"Now, what does this mean, Nicholas? And what about Mr. Devine?"

Mr. Walloway proceeded to state his errand. He told the Countess the amount for which the stocks had been sold, and of her opportunity to buy back Hewington Acres. The Countess Vecchi heard him with widening eyes.

"Do you mean to say that these things were worth all that money?" she demanded.

"At the time they were put on the market, they were."

"And I really have all that?"

"The check is drawn for the full amount, I believe, less the brokerage commission. Here it is." A little paper slipped from his pocket. Not that the Countess Vecchi had checks, for she had a more or less vague acquaintance with the telegraph. They were all from Mr. Devine.

In the first one Mr. Devine asked if the Hewingtons were still there. In the second he was demanded to be informed if the Countess Vecchi had gone. In the third he cautioned Timmins to wire him if the Countess made any preparation for leaving. In the fourth he asked anxiously as to the condition of the Countess Vecchi's sick aunt, whom he had never seen.

Later telegrams instructed Timmins to meet various afternoon trains, and then told him to be at the station at 5.30, as Mr. Devine was coming up on a special.